ABUSING THE POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE OF THE AKHTAMAR LITURGY FOR POLITICAL ENDS

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The Surp Khach (Holy Cross) Church on the Akhtamar Island in Lake Van is historically and culturally significant for the both the Armenian people and for Türkiye. Following the churchs restoration by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the church was opened to the public as a museum in 2007 and was opened for worship in 2010. This years annual liturgy at Akhtamar will be held on 6 September, Sunday, and -as is custom- will be presided by the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Sahak II Mashalian.[1] The annual liturgies on the Akhtamar Island draw significant crowds from both Türkiye and abroad and symbolize the brotherly coexistence of people of different faiths under Türkiyes roof.

It has been reported in the press that among those who will serve in the annual liturgy[2] is Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian (Apostolic) Church of North America (affiliated with the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin). He is already in Türkiye, leading a group of the dioceses pilgrims who will travel to Akhtamar and other historically and culturally significant sites for Armenians across Türkiye.[3] Parsamyans pilgrimage to Türkiye and his participation in the Akhtamar liturgy are benign by their own nature. What is not benign, however, was Parsamyans decision to hold a meeting with Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul on 2 September under the guise of Christian solidarity. On his social media page, Parsamyan has shared the following remarks about the meeting;[4]

> Today, I had the great blessing of visiting the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and meeting with His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople.
>
> During our warm conversation, I expressed my deep respect and gratitude for his faithful ministry, his commitment to Christian unity, and his tireless efforts to advance peace, dialogue, and the care of Gods creation. Our meeting reflected the enduring friendship and brotherhood shared by our ancient Churches.
>
> [...]
>
> May God grant him strength and many fruitful years of ministry. May He also deepen the bonds between our Churches, so that together we may continue to bear witness to the unity and peace of Jesus Christ.

As a middle-ranking Armenian church official visiting Türkiye for pilgrimage, Parsamyan has gone out of his way in meeting the highest-ranking official of a separate church. Parsamyan is no doubt aware that Bartholomew has repeatedly and recklessly transgressed the letter and spirit of the 1923 Lausanne Peacy Treaty understanding[5] because of his political ambitions, and has thus put himself into a controversial position.

It should come as no surprise that there could be consequences as a result of church officials insistence on continuing this pattern of misusing Türkiyes hospitality and courtesy for political ambitions.

**Picture: Meeting between Bishop Mesrop Parsamyan (left) and Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomew (middle) in Istanbul on 2 September 2026 - Source: Facebook*

[1] Mass to be held at Akhtamar this Sunday, *Agos*, September 3, 2026, https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/haber/mass-to-be-held-at-akhtamar-this-sunday-41727

[2] Դէպի Վան՝ Աղթամար Տարեկան Աւանդական Ուխտագնացութիւնը՝ Այս Շաբաթավերջին, *HyeTert*, August 31, 2026, https://hyetert.org/2026/08/31/դէպի-վան՝-աղթամար-տարեկան-աւանդական-ո/

[3] Retrace Your Armenian Roots: Join the Dioceses Pilgrimage to Akhtamar, *Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of Americ*a, May 1, 2026, https://armenianchurch.us/retrace-your-armenian-roots-join-the-dioceses-pilgrimage-to-akhtamar/

[4] *Facebook* post by Mesrop Parsamyan, September 2, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/MesropParsamyan/posts/today-i-had-the-great-blessing-of-visiting-the-ecumenical-patriarchate-in-istanb/2852668291755575/

[5] Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun, The Harmful Effects Of The Politicization Of The Fener Greek Patriarchate, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Analysis No : 2025/21, September 3, 2025, https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/THE-HARMFUL-EFFECTS-OF-THE-POLITICIZATION-OF-THE-FENER-GREEK-PATRIARCHATE ; Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun, Pope Leo XIVs November 2025 Visit To Türkiye: A Push For Ecumenism In The Context Of A Spiritual Journey, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM*), Analysis No : 2026/1, January 12, 2026, https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/POPE-LEO-XIV-S-NOVEMBER-2025-VISIT-TO-TURKIYE-A-PUSH-FOR-ECUMENISM-IN-THE-CONTEXT-OF-A-SPIRITUAL-JOURNEY

About the Author :

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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